

To Whom this may concern,

In 2008 we purchased a building lot south of Bozeman in Hyalite Foothills subdivision. This was a newly platted split lot and therefore the new fire protection covenants applied to this property. This included a requirement to install a fire sprinkler system. At the time of purchase the information provided by the US Fire Administration claimed these systems were safe, inexpensive, inconspicuous, would reduce insurance premiums and increase our property value.

As we proceeded with our building plans we found most of these claims to be false.

USFA said sprinkler systems would cost \$1.60 per square foot or 1-1.5% of construction cost. This is not true. Our cost was at least 3 times this amount.

USFA said that these systems can reduce insurance premiums 5 to 15%. Also not true. Our sprinkler system has no affect on our insurance rates.

USFA said that these systems increase property values. Again not true. Sprinkler systems are not even mentioned on property appraisals. They do not increase property value.

USFA said that these systems can operate on a domestic water supply. Once again not true. We had to upgrade our well pump with a much more expensive variable speed pump adding even more costs.

Although a fire sprinkler system may have increased our home fire safety, these systems have been known to set off prematurely, break, or leak and cause extensive water damage. These risks are downplayed by the USFA but they are real.

USFA calls sprinklers "inconspicuous." In reality they are quite visible.

As the costs of the sprinkler system escalated and we researched our options, we discovered that our house is possibly the only property in our subdivision required to install a sprinkler system. All the other properties, even lots not built on, were grandfathered in. We were being forced to add an expensive system so our house could be the only one in the area with this extra protection. We talked to the Gallatin County Planning Office and our local fire department. The fire chief refused to even consider any options. We offered to help pay the cost of any program the fire department felt might increase fire safety in the neighborhood as a whole. Again, the fire chief refused to even consider any options.

Heath and safety of the general public does not increase when one property in a neighborhood is forced to install an expensive fire suppression system. The system is simply an expensive waste of resources. There needs to be more flexibility in the process so planners and home owners can make common sense decisions.

It is obvious to us that fire safety agencies under estimate the cost and over estimate the value, of sprinkler systems. Remember, fire safety is more than adding sprinklers and no matter what the USFA and fire chiefs claim, to the average home owner they are not cost effective. We certainly believe in safety, but feel that we would all be safer if we install simple smoke alarms in each room, adjust landscaping to keep vegetation away from a structure, use fire resistant building materials, install wood and gas stoves properly and be attentive to home maintenance and fire hazards. These actions would be far more cost effective than installing a very expensive suppression system.

Sincerely, Neal Miller & Kathryn Hiestand
188 Meadowlark Drive
Bozeman, MT 59718
rynneal@gmail.com